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DEPT FOR IO/T AND ISN/MNSA

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TAGS: [IAEA](#) [KNPP](#) [PARM](#) [AORC](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: IAEA/IRAN: EXPLAINING THE NIE TO KEY BOARD MEMBERS

REF: STATE 162558

Classified By: Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte for reasons 1.4, b,c and h

Summary

¶1. (C) South African Governor Abdul Minty told Ambassador Schulte that the NIE is an opportunity for P5 1 negotiations and offered President Mbeki as an intermediary with Iran. Separately, Nuclear Counselor briefed key Board members, including P5 1 DCMs/Counselors, on the implications of the NIE, per reftel, and the need for continuing pressure on Iran along the dual track strategy. UK, France and Canada were supportive of staying the course on Iran, and agreed that the NIE findings reinforced the continued lack of confidence in Iran's nuclear program. Other Board members questioned the nature and timing of the underlying intelligence. End Summary.

South Africa Sees an Opportunity

¶2. (C) Ambassador Schulte met December 5 with South African Governor Abdul Minty to discuss the NIE assessments. Ambassador Schulte argued that the NIE reinforces the need for suspension and moving forward in the UNSC. Minty saw the NIE as an opportunity to convince Iran to come clean on the past and accept a more intrusive verification regime for current programs. He recommended that the UNSC give Iran "more space" by paring back sanctions and welcoming progress on the work plan to reinforce the DG's efforts on outstanding issues and implementation of the AP. He suggested that the UNSC request the DG to provide a new report in February. To restart negotiations, Minty recommended that the June 2006 P5 1 offer be made more specific to encourage Iran to accept a temporary suspension of enrichment activities. He offered South African President Mbeki to serve as an intermediary with the Iranian Supreme Leader. Minty is going to London where he will likely share these thoughts with the FCO PolDir.

Key Board Members Listen Carefully

¶3. (C) Separately, Mission relayed reftel points to all Board members December 4 and briefed DCMs/Counselors from key countries: P5 1, Portugal (EU President), Canada, Australia, Japan, India, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, South Korea and South Africa. Nuclear Counselor and Msnoffs presented key NIE judgments that underlined the continued lack of confidence in Iran's nuclear program and the need to maintain pressure on Iran along the dual-track strategy. France and the UK made helpful interventions along the same lines. France made clear that it would continue to press for a third sanctions resolution in the UNSC. France called the

heightened confidence that Iran had a nuclear weapons program prior to 2003 "worrisome," noting that this would put Iran in the same category as other NPT violators like Libya and the DPRK. He called on the group to remember a number of "facts," such as the history of clandestine nuclear activities, the development of an enrichment program which is inherently dual-use but has no economic rationale, and the fact that the IAEA is not in a position to give assurances as to the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. Suspension remained critical until the IAEA can provide such assurance, he concluded.

¶4. (C) The UK downplayed the importance of the NIE, noting that "nothing has changed." A clandestine nuclear weapons program would have been in contravention of Iran's NPT obligations, and the lack of confidence in Iran's program remained the critical issue. If Iran admits to having had a past nuclear weapons program, then the IAEA will need to verify its declarations. Without greater confidence that its program is entirely peaceful in nature, Iran should not have a program which could be used for military purposes. The NIE findings therefore should not change UK policy.

¶5. (C) Canada was also helpful, pointing out that the conclusions in the Estimate reinforce the need for the IAEA to resolve outstanding issues and for Iran to implement additional transparency measures. Canada noted the potential for Iran to still pursue a weapon capability.

¶6. (C) The German DCM inquired whether the Estimate extended the timeline on uranium enrichment, giving us more time for diplomacy. Nuclear Counselor noted that the timeline in which the intelligence community assesses Iran could have one weapon's worth of HEU is the same as in the last estimate. He pointed out that the more important timeline is that in which Iran develops the technology and know-how to enrich uranium: that process needs to be stopped as soon as possible. He said this leads the US to conclude that pressure on Iran needs to be increased.

¶7. (C) A number of states asked for clarifications of specific judgments that were unanswerable from the guidance. South Korea asked about the nature of the new evidence that had led the IC to the conclusion that Iran had halted its clandestine program in 2003. Several countries queried whether anything had changed in mid-2007 to account for the only "moderate" degree of confidence that Iran had not restarted its program. Mission referred states to the NSC Hadley press conference for some additional details on how the intelligence unfolded.

Comment

¶8. (C) While our closest allies strongly supported us, Russia, China, India, Mexico, Argentina and others were in listening mode and did not offer comments or ask questions. They took on board the elucidation of the Key Judgments leading to the conclusion that diplomatic pressure on Iran must continue and increase. None argued when Nuclear Counselor said it would be hard to conceive of the IAEA closing the remaining outstanding verification questions without a "confession" from Iran. Mission will continue to explain to Vienna Missions that the NIE judgments, while encouraging, do not, in any sense, mean the Iran file is closed or that the IAEA Board Members can relax their vigilance. We will need to be prepared, however, with forceful arguments here and in capitals that rebut the Iranian claim that the NIE clears the way for Iran's file to move back to Vienna from the Security Council. We will also need to assuage close allies who, as the South Korean Ambassador told us, were "deeply embarrassed" by the sudden change in our assessment.
SCHULTE